

Taking Care--Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Care Workers
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2014-2015
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Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Eileen Ordway interview, 2015-05-26 : interview conducted by Nathan J.
Moore and Donald Eugene Stacy**

INTERVIEW LOG

00:00:30 Name is Eileen Ordway. Lives in Springfield, Oregon.

00:00:43 Has been a home care worker since 2008 with Senior & Disabled Services. Has also worked in assisted living facilities.

00:01:10 Works mostly with seniors and people with disabilities. Most of the seniors have been over 65.

00:01:32 Other jobs - assembling thermostats, worked as a cashier in the fast food and retail industries.

00:02:07 What led you to become a caregiver? Separated from partner in 2007 and needed a job.

00:02:38 Caregiving is more intense than previous jobs because it involves other human beings. The goal is to establish "well-rounded connections" with individuals. Her previous jobs have focused on making sales. People are vulnerable and anxious in the home care industry because they have lost independence and are struggling to adapt to illnesses.

00:04:07 Do you need special skills? You need patience. People who are adjusting to new circumstances can be harsh. They are seeking control because everything else in their lives is controlled by doctors. Compassion is also needed.

00:06:38 Home care workers should not take it personally when consumer-employers are short with them. She tries to picture herself in their shoes.

00:07:20 Has attended training programs offered by the Home Care Commission. Also earned a Master's degree in Business with a concentration in Health Care Administration. Likes knowing how people think so she can adapt to various situations.

00:08:38 Typical work day? There is no typical work day. Outside factors affect each day. One of her current consumer-employers is paralyzed from waist down and needs help with the basics (getting dressed, bathing, grooming, etc.). Also works with a woman whose husband is dying, and she needs emotional support.

00:12:00 She does become close to consumer-employers. Shares many life experiences with one of her current consumer-employers. Gives examples and talks about this relationship in detail.

00:15:57 Often meets family members of her consumer-employers. Became good friends with the husband of one of her clients.

00:17:22 Maintaining a professional relationship and giving consumer-employers what they need is not an easy balance. "I walk a tightrope of providing assistance and providing support in all areas. But I have to have a small amount of my own self that's a little distant."

00:19:07 What do you do to relax? Likes to read, hike, go bowling, watch TV with her family.

00:20:17 Works roughly 80 hours per month.

00:20:32 Deals with intimate tasks in a way that conveys respect for individual autonomy. Discusses carrying out intimate tasks for a consumer-employer with paralysis.

00:22:03 Specific moments that capture the essence of being a caregiver - Discusses a consumer-employer who passed away and how her husband knew he did the thing by not putting her in a facility. Understands the need for assisted living centers and nursing homes, but does not think that they employ enough staff. Thinks that facilities are "looking at the bottom line."

00:25:30 Discusses her ideas pertaining to health care reform. Thinks that the medical system focuses too much on prescribing medications and not enough on systemic solution.

00:28:26 Gets together with other home care workers at regional union meetings and at "lobby days." Looking forward to an upcoming picnic sponsored by SEIU [Service Employees International Union]. Wants to help providers in a two- to four-block radius connect with each other.

00:29:54 Talks about how it is easy to feel isolated as a home care worker. Consumer-employers may lack social networks. Home care workers also have atypical work schedules due to consumer-employer needs.

00:31:45 What do caregivers talk about when they get together? They try to relieve stress and answer questions about union benefits. They also discuss their own health difficulties. A lot of health care providers are aging and others are experiencing work-related health issues. There is a common misconception that home care workers are domestic servants. She believes that this perception will change when people involved in long term care become more connected to each other.

00:36:30 Humor on the job - "A sense of humor helps a person see a silver lining in a day that can be very difficult." Talks about being able to use humor with her clients. Important to understand what consumer-employers find funny.

00:37:37 The most gratifying part of the job - knowing that she is assisting someone with a sense of connection and belonging.

00:38:48 The most challenging part - adapting and adjusting to the various needs of consumer-employers.

00:39:40 Being a union member has made a positive impact on her life. Describes the differences between working as a unionized home care worker and working in non-union assisted living facilities. The non-union facilities did not have enough staff, which led to unsafe situations. Believes that she has an obligation as a worker to help shape the industry.

00:44:37 Has spoken about her work at the State Capitol as part of a statewide campaign for paid sick leave days.

00:45:51 Has spoken in legislators' offices and enjoys the political nature of the union's work.

00:46:33 Discusses what the union does at "lobby days." Currently, the focus is on the "fair shot agenda," which emphasizes that home care workers are advocating for others in the community, who need paid sick leave, retirement security, etc. Talks about the precarious retirement situations of many home care workers, who cannot generate enough work credits for social security. Also describes potential mechanisms for alleviating the problem.

00:55:22 Works with both men and women.

00:55:44 What is one thing that people might not know about your job? "What they probably don't know is that they can make the difference between the consumer-employer being part of the community or the consumer-employer living in the community and having no sense of belonging."

00:58:33 End of interview.00:43:05: Union makes caregiving a job worth having. Prestige with pay and benefits. Get health insurance through co-op and Affordable Care Act (ACA). ACA helps take insurance off the bargaining table as an issue.

00:45:55: Career pathways for home care workers. On cutting edge in Oregon. Home care workers have closest access to consumer. Providing gloves important.

00:47:55: Asked to speak to legislators in Connecticut. Told that her testimony impacted a key legislator. No new nursing homes in Oregon in 20 years. Saves lots of money for state. No more basic freedom than choosing where you live.

00:52:57: Profession of health care is honorable, dignified. Some people don't recognize that.

00:54:30: Caregiving a lot like being a parent. Parents don't take sick days. Hard for caregivers to take sick days. Must push through it. Consumers still have needs.

00:57:03: Off work: likes television, movies. Union is her "hobby." Goes to coast, likes to read.

00:58:44: Importance of caregiving to individual, society, and the state. Amazing program I intend to keep fighting for.

00:59:38: end of interview.